

WASHINGTON POST
28 August 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 4-21

French Secret Service Hit

Reforms Urged After Protest Ship Attack

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Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS, Aug. 27—Prime Minister Laurent Fabius called for reforms in France's secret services today following allegations that they were involved in the sabotage of an environmental group's ship in New Zealand last month.

Commenting on the results of an official inquiry into the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, Fabius said he knew of nothing to contradict findings absolving both the French government and the secret services of responsibility for organizing the attack. The ship was sunk by two mines as it was preparing for a protest mission against French nuclear policies in the Pacific.

Acknowledging that democratic control over the secret services was unsatisfactory, Fabius told journalists that he would ask the defense and interior ministers to submit annual reports to parliament on intelligence-gathering activities. He said that the official investigation had revealed "important shortcomings" in the intelligence services.

The prime minister's statement appeared to be an attempt by the Socialist government to head off suggestions of a cover-up. Fabius said France condemned the "criminal action" unreservedly and would cooperate with New Zealand in bringing the guilty to justice.

Two officers in France's General Directorate for External Security (DGSE), the French equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency, are awaiting trial in New Zealand on charges of murdering a Portuguese photographer for the Greenpeace organization who was killed in the July 10 attack. International arrest warrants have been issued for three other DGSE agents now back in France.

French commentators reacted today with a mixture of skepticism and outright disbelief to the official report, which acknowledged the DGSE agents' presence in New Zealand on a "reconnaissance" mis-

sion but cleared them of blowing up the Rainbow Warrior. The report was drawn up by Bernard Tricot, a former chief of staff to the late Gen. Charles de Gaulle, at the request of Fabius.

"Tricot Washes Whiter" ran the headline in two Paris dailies, Liberation and Parisien. Other newspapers pointed out apparent contradictions between the 29-page report and evidence gathered by the New Zealand police.

Reaction in opposition circles generally was more restrained; many leaders of the right-wing opposition abstained from comment. In a statement explaining why he would keep silent, former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing said: "Right or wrong, it is still my country."

The sharpest criticism came from a member of the centrist Republican Party, Alain Madelin, who said the official explanation "took Frenchmen for imbeciles."

Several commentators asked why it was necessary for the DGSE to send four frogmen, all expert in underwater sabotage, to New Zealand if their mission was limited to observing Greenpeace.

In New Zealand, Prime Minister David Lange described the Tricot report as "too transparent to be even a whitewash." He suggested to a radio interviewer that "there is a time bomb ticking away for Mr. Tricot and the French government if the French opposition is any good at all."

Lange's comments, as well as reaction to the Tricot report in France, appeared to reflect a significant raising of the political stakes. If the DGSE agents are innocent, the French press and the New Zealand government stand to look stupid. If the agents are guilty, the French government risks being accused of having attempted a cover-up.

[The Rainbow Warrior controversy spilled into Britain as a spokesman for the opposition Labor Party called on the government to launch its own investigation, Washington Post correspondent Karen DeYoung reported from London.

[Noting that the ship flew the British flag, former merchant seaman John Prescott, a Labor member of Parliament, said that under British law, an investigation is required whenever a ship is lost.

[There were additional suggestions in the British press that New Zealand may have been tipped off to possible French participation in the sinking by MI5, Britain's domestic security agency. A London dealer reportedly sold to a French-speaking man, the special rubber dinghies New Zealand has said were used in surveillance of the Rainbow Warrior. The suggestion here is that the London salesman reported to MI5 the purchase by the man, who paid in cash and declined to have a sale slip written up.]

Fabius called upon the New Zealand government to inform the French judicial authorities of all the evidence against the DGSE agents. He said that any French citizen found to have taken part in the sabotage would be prosecuted.

Conceding that "question marks persist" in the DGSE's handling of the affair, the prime minister called for an investigation of the agency's "shortcomings" by Defense Minister Charles Hernu.

Observers noted that—contrary to the impression given by Fabius—there is no specific reference to DGSE "shortcomings" in the Tricot report. In fact, the report goes out of its way to emphasize that discipline in the agency generally has been tightened since the appointment of Adm. Pierre Lacoste as director general in November 1982.

Fabius refused to answer reporters' questions after his brief statement.

The dilemma facing the government was reflected in an editorial in Liberation, an independent leftist daily, which said that the Socialists had laid themselves open to charges of incompetence whatever the outcome of the "Greenpeace affair."

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If it is shown that DGSE agents did indeed sabotage the Rainbow Warrior, the entire operation was clearly very badly bungled. If, on the other hand, it turns out that someone else was responsible for the attack in order to embarrass the French secret services, then the DGSE can be accused of falling into the trap.

In its first official reaction to the Tricot report, the Greenpeace movement described the French version of the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior as "an insult to public intelligence and world opinion."